

The Crucible, Act IV, by Arthur Miller**Reading Strategy: Apply Themes to Contemporary Events**

In *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller writes about a town in the grip of fear. Miller's play also refers to paranoia in America during the 1950's, when fear of communism was widespread, and even knowing a person "soft" on communism caused one to be suspected of treason.

The play also has as one of its themes the nature of belief and systems of "truth." What went so wrong in Salem in the 1690's? How could some people in the 1950's lose their good judgment? Does thinking like this still occur today?

DIRECTIONS: Write the significance of each of the following passages to the play. Comment on what it might also have meant to Americans in the times of McCarthyism in the 1950's. Finally, express what meaning the passage may have today about particular or general issues. Write your answers in the space provided.

1. They believed, in short, that they held in their steady hands the candle that would light the world. We have inherited this belief, and it has helped us and hurt us.

2. The witch-hunt was a perverse manifestation of the panic which set in among all classes when the balance began to turn toward greater individual freedom. . . . It is still impossible for man to organize his social life without repressions, and the balance has yet to be struck between order and freedom.

3. In the countries of the Communist ideology, all resistance of any import is linked to the totally malign capitalist succubi, and in America any man who is not reactionary in his views is open to the charge of alliance with the Red hell.

4. DANFORTH: In an ordinary crime, how does one defend the accused? One calls up witnesses to prove his innocence. But witchcraft is *ipso facto*, on its face and by its nature, an invisible crime, is it not? Therefore, who may possibly be witness to it?
